



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 118th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 169

WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2023

No. 27

Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable RAPHAEL G. WARNOCK, a Senator from the State of Georgia.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal Spirit, the fountain of light and truth, we rise and stand because of Your mercies. You make our plans succeed.

Today, shine the light of Your presence upon our Senators. As they wrestle with complexity, show them the way. Lord, give them the wisdom You have promised to all who will simply request it. Remind them of Your mission to bring deliverance to captives and liberty to the bruised. May our lawmakers focus on pleasing You and not on political consequences. Give them contrite and humble spirits. Teach them new and creative ways to cooperate with each other for the common good.

We pray in Your merciful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mrs. MURRAY).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, February 9, 2023.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable RAPHAEL G. WARNOCK, a Senator from the State of Georgia, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATTY MURRAY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. WARNOCK thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of DeAndrea Gist Benjamin, of South Carolina, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Fourth Circuit.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, 13 percent of the American people believe the state of our Union is strong—13 percent. Just 16 percent say they are

better off financially today than they were 2 years ago. But on Tuesday night, it took President Biden the most words in the history of the State of the Union to declare that everything is actually going swimmingly and he doesn't plan to change a thing.

To working families, who have been crushed by historic inflation because of his policies, President Biden offered to cut a few dollars off the fees of concert tickets and hotel stays they can't afford anyway. To Americans who are worried that he just let a Chinese spy balloon surveil our country from coast to coast, the President described his slow and unsteady reaction as a big success. To a country that is already teetering on the brink of recession because of him, President Biden proposed even more gigantic new tax hikes. To the American people who are frightened and curious about surging violent crime, President Biden took aim at the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding citizens and implied that taxpayers need to pay for even more welfare spending before we can expect people not to commit murder.

The President paid lip service to the obscene quantities of foreign fentanyl that flow across our open borders and kill our people, but his main border proposal was to dangle the prospect of amnesty for people who come here illegally.

He repeated his broken promise not to sign tax hikes that hit the middle class when he has already hiked taxes on American jobs and American energy.

The country got to hear a lecture about treating political opponents with respect from the President who lied about State voting laws and compared half the country to Bull Connor and Jefferson Davis and a lecture about our democratic institutions from the President who endorsed permanently breaking the Senate so that his party could grab more power.

President Biden expressed not one ounce of contrition or accountability

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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for the failures that have hurt families, cost his party the House, and left only 16 percent of Americans better off financially now than they were on Inauguration Day.

And the President's thin and paltry discussion of his failing foreign policy was downright alarming. Europe is in the grip of the continent's worst violent conflict since World War II. China is gaining as the largest strategic threat to American security since the Soviet Union. The Taliban has reinstated their oppressive regime and safe terrorist haven that America and our allies chased out more than two decades ago.

North Korea continues to modernize its nuclear and missile programs, making steady progress toward the leader's goal of being able to deliver Armageddon to our doorstep.

The Iranian regime continues to advance its own WMD programs while sponsoring terror campaigns all across the Middle East. Make no mistake, this radical regime is willing and eager to kill Americans if it is not deterred. And while the Iranian people protest nationwide against a brutal theocracy, President Biden couldn't even muster one mention of their struggle.

This is the state of the world on President Biden's watch. This is the state of America's interests under his leadership. But President Biden did not even mention the grave and growing challenges we face from abroad until the tail end of his lengthy remarks.

The President downplayed the threat posed by the People's Republic of China and claimed without any evidence that the United States was in its strongest position to compete with China in decades. I am not sure in what universe those remarks apply. Here in the real world, China's intelligence services just got a closeup look of the entire U.S. mainland. Reports indicate Chinese hypersonic weapons and land-based ICBM launchers exceed our own. And President Biden's last budget proposal tried to cut our national defense funding after inflation. The Commander in Chief seems more preoccupied with hidden "resort fees" than hidden Chinese malware in our phones, computers, and high-tech infrastructure.

Then there is Ukraine. President Biden said Putin's invasion of Ukraine has been a test of America's and our allies' resolve. That is certainly true, but, like the Chinese balloon, the Ukraine crisis was also a test of the Biden administration's response time, and they fell quite short.

Republicans tried to push the administration to better equip Ukraine to defend itself before the tanks rolled and to act more quickly and decisively in the early weeks to try to prevent a protracted stalemate. The indecision, hand-wringing, and sluggishness have carried a heavy price indeed. The President can't even get the bully pulpit right.

There is an overwhelmingly persuasive case that aiding Ukraine strongly

and directly serves our core American national interests, but President Biden seems incapable of articulating any of it. It is top Republicans who are filling the leadership vacuum, connecting the dots, and making the case. Yet again, Presidential leadership is missing in action, and it is Republicans filling the void. So let's hope President Biden's upcoming defense budget request will treat our national security challenges more seriously than his speech did on Tuesday night.

With fewer than one in five Americans calling the state of our Union strong, President Biden needed to pivot, but he failed to. He spent the wordiest State of the Union in American history making excuses, doubling down, and spinning alternate realities. But if Washington Democrats will not pivot, the American people will pivot away from them. It is already starting.

Seated behind the President Tuesday night was the new Republican Speaker of the House, KEVIN MCCARTHY, and following him on the airwaves was the youngest Governor in America, Sarah Huckabee Sanders of Arkansas—part of a whole wave of Republican Governors who are laser-focused on fighting crime, improving education, and lifting more working families into prosperity.

The American people know which principles and solutions will bring our country back, and they are seeing which party actually provides them.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that following the 11 a.m. vote today, the Senate recess until 1 p.m.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, on Tuesday, President Biden delivered his State of the Union Address to Congress, and in this time of divided government, I was glad to see the President making more than one nod to bipartisanship. I do think this moment, with power split between Democrats and Republicans, provides a real oppor-

tunity to work together, to move away from the extreme partisanship of the past couple of years and make some real progress on some of the issues facing us.

But the President's speech also left me concerned because the President demonstrated almost no awareness of what actually happened as a result of his policies. Indeed, at times, it seemed as if the President had lived through a different reality from the one most Americans have been experiencing over the past 2 years.

The President rattled off a list of his supposed economic achievements, and I say "supposed" because he left out some vitally important context. He claimed credit for the historic job creation while leaving out the essential detail that a lot of that job creation was simply a result of the economy naturally adding back jobs temporarily lost during the pandemic. He talked about wage growth while leaving out the fact that real wages have declined—have declined—because of inflation over his Presidency. And he appeared to take credit for the fact that inflation has declined somewhat in recent months while neglecting to mention that it was his administration and congressional Democrats who helped create our inflation crisis with their American Rescue Plan spending spree.

Nor did the President spend any time discussing just how bad inflation still is and how many Americans are still suffering. Inflation in December was 6.5 percent. The last time inflation was that bad was in 1982—1982—40 years ago. I am glad inflation has declined somewhat, but I don't think the President has a lot to be congratulating himself about. Even if prices stopped increasing tomorrow, Americans would still be paying thousands of dollars more over the next year to achieve the same standard of living that they had when the President took office.

Again, the President and congressional Democrats and their American Rescue Plan spending spree bear a huge part of the responsibility for this situation. Or to quote former Obama economic adviser, Jason Furman:

The original sin was an oversized American Rescue Plan.

Another of the supposed economic achievements the President talked about Tuesday night was cutting the deficit. Yes, cutting the deficit. Well, let me just quote CNN on that claim. This is a quote:

Independent analysts say Biden's own actions, including his laws and executive orders, have had the overall effect of adding to current and projected future deficits, not reducing those deficits.

Let me just repeat that:

Independent analysts say Biden's own actions, including his laws and executive orders, have had the overall effect of adding to current and projected future deficits, not reducing those deficits.

The President failed to meaningfully address the economic crisis that his policies have helped to create. Instead,